



News Release

For immediate release: May 20, 2009

(09-088)

Contacts: Cari-Franz-West, Shellfish Program
Allison Cook, Communications Office

360-236-3326
360-236-4022

Raw oysters and warm weather — a risky combination

Eating certain oysters raw can make you sick

OLYMPIA — Warm weather is here and harvesting oysters at the beach is a popular pastime. People should think twice before eating oysters raw when it's warm outside — it's prime time for contracting illness.

High temperatures can warm the water where oysters live. This may promote the growth of bacteria such as *Vibrio parahaemolyticus*. These naturally-occurring bacteria can make people sick with vibriosis when oysters taken from warm water are eaten raw.

Vibriosis can cause diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps, headache, vomiting, fever, and chills. Symptoms usually appear within 12-24 hours of eating infected shellfish. Vibriosis is usually mild to moderate and lasts for two to seven days; it can be life threatening for people with lowered immunity or chronic liver disease.

Recreational harvesters should practice these tips when harvesting oysters this summer to stay healthy and avoid vibriosis:

- Make sure oysters are placed on ice or refrigerated as soon as possible after harvest.
- Don't harvest oysters that have been exposed by the receding tide for a long time — if the temperature's high, pass them by.
- Always cook oysters thoroughly. *Vibrio* bacteria are destroyed when oysters are cooked at 145° F for 15 seconds. Fully-cooked oysters can be recontaminated if rinsed with seawater.

—More—

Vibrio warning

May 20, 2009

Page 2

Commercial harvesters also take extra precautions during warm weather. From May through September, special control measures are in place to prevent illness outbreaks from eating raw oysters. Shellfish companies are required to quickly refrigerate oysters after they're harvested, and they must maintain detailed harvest and temperature control records. Training is required for companies that harvest oysters intended to be eaten raw during warm temperatures.

More information on shellfish safety is on the Department of Health [Office of Shellfish and Water Protection's Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/) (<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehp/sf/>).

###

Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
--